DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 803 CS 507 029

AUTHOR Sullivan, Laura A.
TITLE Public Speaking and Library Research: A Textbook's Responsibilities.
PUB DATE 19 Nov 89
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; *Communication Skills; *Critical Thinking; Higher Education; Library Instruction; *Library Skills; Online Searching; *Public Speaking; Student Research; *Textbook Content; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Research; User Needs (Information)

ABSTRACT

A close examination of nine popular speech textbooks was conducted to determine how adequately and accurately they covered researching in the library and its importance in the speechmaking process for the student. Results indicated that the texts did not emphasize critical thinking skills; they also contained an inappropriate emphasis on online database searching as a source for research information, and information errors about the library. Public speaking texts which present library research information should (1) stress critical thinking skills; (2) emphasize evaluation of information for all kinds of speeches and explain more fully how a student evaluates information; and (3) provide accurate information about library research. Textbook authors can better meet their responsibilities to students if they take a general approach to library research discussion and ask a reference librarian to help with the writing of the library section. (Thirteen references are attached.) (MG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314803

Public Speaking and Library Research: A Textbook's Responsibilities

Laura A. Sullivan

Paper Presented at the
Speech Communication Association Convention
for the
Senior and College University Section

November 19, 1989

CS507039

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Laura A. Sullivan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TITLE: Public Speaking and Library Research: A Textbook's Responsibilities

AUTHOR: Laura A. Sullivan

ABSTRACT: Most public speaking textbooks include a section or chapter on how to use the library. However, many provide only a cursory explanation of library research skills. A sample of textbooks in the field was examined for library coverage. This paper discusses the results of this examination and suggests three responsibilities public speaking texts have to the student when presenting library research information.

Laura A. Sullivan is Head of Public Services and a Reference Librarian at Steely Library, Northern Kentucky University.

Public Speaking

and Library Research:

A Textbook's Responsibilities

Students I have had for public speaking may not have considered themselves very lucky; I was not only their speech instructor, I was also a full-time reference librarian. This meant that I subconsciously expected strong library research skills (or at least improved skills over the course of the semester) and, naturally, interest in the library. Understandably, this was not always the case.

With all the other public speaking information a teacher has to convey to a class in a short amount of time, it is hard to give high priority to library skills. These skills are certainly as important as outlining and organizational aptitudes, but often less emphasis is given to them. Many teachers do not even have the time to schedule a session with a librarian to aid students in preparing speeches.

Even I noticed my own inadequacies in helping students learn important research methods which would improve the quality of their speeches. I also noticed my own efforts were not reinforced;

assistance from my textbook in covering use of the library would have been invaluable.

As a result, I decided to examine other speech texts to discover how adequately and accurately they cover using the library and its importance in the speechmaking process.

Although my conclusions are drawn from speech communication texts, the recommendations I arrived at from the sample review are applicable to introductory textbooks where research techniques are presented. Certainly, beginning texts in such disciplines as composition, sociology, and history would benefit from greater attention to the library research component.

Observations

The public speaking texts I examined for quality of library research coverage were the following: DeVito (1987), Ehninger, Gronbeck, McKerrow & Monroe (1986), Fisher & Smith (1985), Gregory (1987), Katula (1987), Lucas (1986), Minnick (1983), Ross (1986), and Verderber (1988). These texts (except one) are listed in the Speech Communication Association's 1988 Checklist of Books and Cassettes in Communication. Unable to find a list of the "best" public speaking texts, I

chose to examine a sample of some currently used in the field.

Each text I examined offered notable strengths as well as weaknesses. However, I observed overall: 1) There is a lack of emphasis on critical thinking skills; 2) There is an inappropriate emphasis on online database searching as a source for research information; and 3) There are often information errors about the library. Certainly authors of these texts, as well as speech teachers, have responsibilities to the student when presenting library research information.

First of all, texts should emphasize critical thinking skills. "Critical thinking" is the current buzzword in library instruction literature, as well as in the literature of other disciplines. McCormick (1983) insists that librarians should not convey to students that finding information is the important thing; rather, what they do with the information is the key point. McCormick states,

> In the research process, searching for information should lead students to the really interesting part--dealing critically

> with information . . . The reason students find the process of using an index, getting a magazine article, and feeding it (almost unchanged) back to a professor (who has probably read the same news magazine) to be a boring experience is because it <u>is</u> boring (339).

How many speech instructors complain about the quality of the information delivered by students in their persuasive speeches? How many challenge the information the students present? Part of the reason students often give mediocre speeches is their inability to use the information they find critically. McCormick (1983) says, "Critical thinking is more than fact-finding; it involves the ability to distinguish fact from fiction, to notice opinion, and actually to think about whether we will accept the 'facts' and agree with the opinions to which they may or may not lead" (340). She goes on to define what critical thinkers do: identify main issues, elaborate evidence, recognize bias and emotional appeals, know their own attitudes and blind spots, to name a few (McCormick 1983, 340). These skills

should be presented in depth in the library research portions of public speaking texts.

You may think this is too much to ask of the freshman speech student; I feel it is essential to the college learning experience. I am sure many speech teachers try, as I do, to emphasize critical thinking skills in the development, organization, and presentation of speeches in the classroom. I do so in my library session with the students. But the public speaking texts need to hold up their own end as instruments in helping students develop these abilities.

Many of the texts I looked at briefly ask their readers to examine a source or notice whether a source is current and/or comprehensive, for example. Some authors discuss this in their chapters on persuasion, refutation, or argumentation. However, these kinds of critical thinking skills should be discussed at length in the library section of the text since they are important for all types of speeches.

For most public speaking texts, the norm is a cursory treatment of library research with a tendency toward the "list" approach. Library sources are generally put into

categories--indexes, biographical sources, newspapers, etc.--with titles listed under each category. This is useful insofar as familiarizing students with names of some necessary sources, but knowing that Humanities Index, for example, is a subject index does not tell a student why that index should be used, and what the student should do with the information he/she finds there.

In addition, the listmaking approach can be biased toward an author's favorite sources, or only the ones he/she knows about, or ones suggested by a librarian at the school where the author teaches. Texts need to be more general when discussing library research since, for one thing, libraries vary in their holdings--what one library has another may not--and this can limit the universality of a text. And it overlooks another crucial point--what type of tool is the best place to go for X type of information? For example, why should one go to Index Medicus for the most current information on new drugs for Aids' treatment instead of the card catalog? Frick (1982) states, "Searchers who know that to find certain types of material, in whatever field, they should go to certain types of sources, have

taken a major step toward becoming independent learners" (199).

Speech texts too should emphasize evaluation of information for all kinds of speeches and explain more fully how a student evaluates information. Oberman and Linton (1982) state that evaluation is "the most significant step in the process of library research problem-solving" (113). Evaluation means reviewing and examining tools and selecting appropriate sources based on "accuracy, currency, depth of information, and level of information" (Oberman and Linton 1982, 113). Evaluation also involves perspective or "recognition of viewpoints that may color the analysis of an argument" (Oberman and Linton 1982, 113). For example, if a student is preparing an informative speech on prayer in public schools, an author's point of view may be an important consideration when looking for basic information on this topic. The point of view expressed by a reporter covering the topic for Time may differ from that of an educator treating the same topic in Religious Education.

Also, choosing and refining a topic through subject encyclopedias can utilize students'

evaluative skills, as can looking at information on a catalog card when deciding what books to choose on a topic.

I do not intend to explain the many ways critical thinking skills can be integrated into speech instruction; this is documented better elsewhere. Rather, I am observing that speech texts basically neglect this area; at the same time teachers ponder why their students are not giving better speeches. Speech texts can and should change their approach to library research--spend more time discussing where to look for certain types of information and how a student interprets the information once found. Too many texts simply hint at these skills or leave it to students to figure out how to think critically for themselves. Students need help with developing critical thinking habits via their textbook, reinforcement/explanation by their instructor, and a library session with the expert, the reference librarian. The chapter on library research should be as important as other chapters since what students say is a direct result of their research and their ability to thoughtfully put a speech together.

Another responsibility speech texts have is to provide accurate information about library research. Specifically, several texts I examined showed a lack of understanding regarding online (or computer) database searching. Several texts explained the concept of online searching very well, but for the most part, online searching was inaccurately conveyed as the easy, timesaving answer to a student's research needs.

First of all, not all research topics are suitable for an online search. If online searching is to be discussed in a speech text, this needs to be brought to the attention of the student. For example, general topics, humanities topics, and even some social sciences topics work very poorly online. To illustrate, searching for the broad topic "mainstreaming" in ERIC (an education database) yielded 4806 hits--the number of articles in which the term "mainstreaming" occurred. Such a large number of articles is unmanageable to weed through and far too costly to print. Usually two or more concepts are necessary for an effective search: combining "mainstreaming" with "kindergarten" lessened the number of hits considerably to 69 documents

containing both concepts. It is worth noting that online searching is usually inappropriate for this very reason for lower division research. Students in lower division speech classes tend to choose speech topics that are too general for a search. Their speech topics do not require a comprehensive search of the literature either, whereas, graduate or doctoral students may need a comprehensive review for a dissertation.

Generally then an online search is best considered if the subject is complex and contains two or more concepts, if the subject is new or new terminology is developed (databases are more up-to-date than their print counterparts), if a topic is narrowly defined, or if there is no print equivalent to a database or the library does not have the printed index (Online Information 1985). Even if a topic meets the requirements of an online search, it is still important that a student initially spend time in a printed index (this is policy in my library) so he/she can gain an understanding of the topic and become familiar with terminology related to the topic. This preliminary research serves to increase an online search's effectiveness, since a searcher can

pinpoint more exactly what kind of information a student wants. An online search, in fact, should supplement a user's own research, not replace it.

Secondly, texts seem to overlook the fact that an online search does not act as an evaluative tool. A search is basically a bibliography on a research topic. Some citations will be useful to the user, some will not--which is what happens when one looks for citations in a printed index. Just as a student must evaluate the usefulness of a source via a print index, so must he/she do the same with an online search. An incident at our reference desk exemplified a common misconception--a student assumed that an online search provided only the "best" articles on a topic. She was surprised to find out that she would still need to look at the citations to determine their usefulness to her.

Some textbooks serve to perpetuate this myth by stating that the computer does the work for the student. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially if we are trying to teach students the importance of evaluating information, i.e., examining an index citation to check type of

publication (scholarly or popular), length of article, whether a bibliography is included, etc. These kinds of observations answer the question--will this citation be useful to my research?--and can only be made by the student.

Online searching can be very valuable for a student's research. However, speech texts must clearly explain the advantages and disadvantages of online searching. Discussion must also convey that an online search does not do the essential work that can make a speech good or bad. The responsibility for quality still remains with the student as he/she makes critical decisions about the usefulness of the material an online search provides.

In addition to being correct when covering online searching, texts need to be generally reliable in the library information they provide. I found numerous cases of misinformation in the examined texts. For example, DeVito (1987) said that Reader's Guide does not index Rolling Stone (it does); Fisher & Smith (1985) said that the call number on a catalog card is in the top right corner of the card (it's in the top left corner); Ross (1986) said the Encyclopedia of Associations

is an index (it's a directory); Lucas (1986) assumes all libraries catalog periodicals (they don't), to name a few.

Conclusion

Speech textbooks can better meet the three responsibilities discussed here and I have two suggestions on how textbook authors can do so: 1) Take a general approach to your library research discussion. Emphasize critical thinking skills that can be applied to all kinds of research, instead of focusing on the mechanics of using the library (since every library differs in procedures used in locating materials). This general approach increases the usefulness of a textbook since a student can apply general concepts to his/her research no matter where he/she goes to school; 2) Ask a reference librarian to write the library section, consult a reference librarian on the section, or have the section proofread by the reference librarian. Many texts encourage students to use the services of the reference librarians when researching their speech topics--most would probably be happy to help authors as well.

Speech teachers and librarians are working toward the same goal: a "thinking" student, both in the library during speech preparation and in the classroom where we witness the spoken product. These recommendations for the public speaking text might help to reach this goal.

References

DeVito, J. A. 1987. The elements of public speaking. 3d ed. New York: Harper & Row.

Ehninger, D., B. E. Gronbeck, R. E. McKerrow, and A. H. Monroe. 1986. Principles and types of speech communication. 10th ed. Glenview: Scott, Foresman.

Fisher, T. and T. L. Smith. 1985. Icebreaker: A manual for public speaking. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Frick, E. 1982. Teaching information structure: Turning dependent researchers into self-teachers. In Theories of bibliographic education, ed. C. Oberman and K. Strauch, 193-208. New York: R. R. Bowker.

Gregory, H. 1987. Public speaking for college and career. New York: Random House.

Katula, R. A. 1987. Principles and patterns of public speaking. Belmont: Wadsworth.

Lucas, S. E. 1986. The art of public speaking. 2d ed. New York: Random House.

McCormick, M. 1983. Critical thinking and library instruction. RQ 22:339-342.

Minnick, W. C. 1983. Public speaking. 2d ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Oberman, C. and R. A. Linton. 1982. Guided design: Teaching library research as problem solving. In Theories of bibliographic education, ed. C. Oberman and K. Strauch, 111-134. New York: R. R. Bowker.

Online Information Service Guide Sheet. 1985. Highland Heights: Northern Kentucky University.

Ross, R. S. 1986. Speech communication: Fundamentals and practice. 7th ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Verderber, R. F. 1988. The challenge of effective speaking. 7th ed. Belmont: Wadsworth.